



## Aruba's police and youth get together for "Let's Talk 2"

This past week saw the second of the "Let's Talk" conferences for Aruba's youth that have been organized by the local police department under the stewardship of Deputy Commissioner of Police Trudy Hassel. For three days, the Renaissance Convention Center was filled to capacity with island children from middle school age and up for a program that confronts anger management and the negative directions that they could possibly take with their lives.

Rap culture from both North and South America is seen by the police, parents, and many community leaders as having a negative influence on our island's young people. Changing attitudes and lack of respect not only for their elders but themselves is of great concern for many parents and youth councilors. They know that teenagers are easily influenced, and often, pop culture is the behavior they emulate, and the direction of today's pop culture is disturbing to many, as it should be.

Police spokesman Detective John Larmonie was on the stage of the convention center with therapists and consultants to talk with the students and answer questions about what is happening in the world and how it affects them. The influence of music and music videos, violent games, films and TV shows that inure the public to the horror of violence and promote disrespect can have a negative effect on our youth, which is affirmed by newspapers headlines everyday.

Last year's "Let's Talk" conference focused on substance abuse and teenage pregnancy aside from violence. This year the focus was completely on youth violence, as this is abhorrent to the people of Aruba, and they have strong concerns in regards to their children. After some humorous dramatizations and films about jealousy and the misconceptions of anger and its manifestations a moment came that silenced the two thousand raucous teenagers that filled the hall.

A young man of an Aruban mother and Dutch father who was living in Holland for many years took the stage. He told of his experiences of being involved with a youth gang in Holland for a number of years, and its consequences. Aside from numerous knife wounds and fractures resulting from gang fights, he told a tale of fear, sorrow, and substance abuse. He exhorted the young people not to get involved in such activities as he had done, that it will only ruin their lives. It was an impressive moment as he held the attention of every child in the room, and they cheered him when he finished his speech. The children appreciated his bravery in coming forward to tell his story, and his desire to spare young people from his terrible experiences. His first hand testimony very likely will accomplish more than any films, books, and lectures that adults can possibly force on teenagers that will rarely listen to their elders.

The "Let's Talk 2" conference ended with a performance of rap music by the youth group "Unity." These young men have also had some first hand experience with violence and in response have written a song that preaches against it. It would appear they had quite a fan club amongst the teenage girls, and the conference ended on a very upbeat note. The "Let's Talk" program will continue throughout the year with a four-pronged program that includes "Let's Talk Kids," which entails going into the individual communities and taking the message to the grammar schools. Over the summer, the police will conduct a "Boot Camp" and a free DART camp (**D**iscipline, **A**mor (love) **R**espect and **T**olerance.)

The future of our children is a concern for every parent and community around the world, and for Arubans also. The children are the future of our island and society, and when we see it threatened by negative influences and actions, as a community we must act to protect our youth. Aruba's police are well aware of the necessity of preventing youth violence. They have taken very pro-active actions in insuring that Aruba continues to be the peaceful place it has always been by initiating a number of very commendable actions and programs aimed at preventing problems. John Charmonie stated that history and studies show that education and prevention is the only *real* solution to these problems that plague today's children, who constantly face temptation, and the program will continue to reach out to the island's youth.